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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Every year in which women continue to face State-sanctioned discrimination in the form of discriminatory laws is another year of suffering and lost opportunity for girls and women and their communities, at the local, national and international levels. Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, which includes the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, will not be achieved without basic legal equality for women and girls.

One measure of the achievement of Goal 3, in particular, should be meeting the concrete promises outlined in international human rights frameworks with regard to gender equality. For example, 15 years ago, in the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing (which is "an agenda for women's empowerment"), 189 Governments agreed that laws that discriminate against women undermine equality and pledged to "revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex". Yet inequality, including in its most overt form, has not been vanquished. The target date of 2005 established by the General Assembly for revocation of those laws has come and gone. Most recently, in a resolution adopted at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in March 2010, Member States again urged States to review and, where appropriate, revise, amend or abolish all laws that discriminated against women and girls or have a discriminatory impact on women and girls, 15 years after the goal had first been set.

In our reports, *Words and Deeds: Holding Governments Accountable in the Beijing Review Process*, published in 1999, 2004 and 2010, Equality Now highlights explicitly discriminatory laws with regard to violence against women, personal status, economic status and marital status. These laws prevent the full participation of women at all levels of society, thereby hindering their personal development and denying them their fundamental right to equality.

The *Millennium Development Goals Report 2009* noted, in the section on Goal 3, that although more women had been able to secure paid jobs outside agriculture, they had generally failed to access decent work. This is not surprising when a woman is prohibited by law in some countries from certain types and hours of employment or prohibited by her husband from freely choosing employment. Other laws, such as the recent Shia Personal Status Law of 2009 in Afghanistan, indirectly affect women's participation in employment by limiting a married woman's freedom to leave the house.

Resolution 12/17, adopted by the Human Rights Council in October 2009, requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on how the issue of discrimination against women, in law and practice, was addressed throughout the United Nations system. The issue will be taken up again in September 2010, coinciding with the Millennium Development Goals summit. Equality Now urges all Member States to support the creation of a special mechanism on equality before the law to aid Member States to remove remaining sex discriminatory laws as a concrete step towards fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals.